

## Chapter 7

# Community Relations

Public opinion about the Army is greatly influenced by the actions of each command. What the command does for its local community or fails to do affects the perceptions and attitudes of the American people, upon whom the Army depends for its support and existence. This applies not only to official acts but also to unofficial acts, which by their commission or omission affects public opinion. This principle also applies to individual members of the Army, their dependents and Army civilian employees in their personal contacts with the civilian community. Conducting community relations is a vital element to successful public affairs operations. Commanders and public affairs officers (PAO) must seize on key opportunities to gain and maintain links to internal and external publics.

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### EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY RELATIONS

7-1. PA personnel act in concert with veteran's groups, civic leaders and local populations to increase understanding and build support for Army activities. Army support to and participation in public events is based on the fact that the Army belongs to the American people. Common ownership requires that Army resources be used to support events and activities of common interest and benefit.

7-2. Effective community relations requires:

- Command supervision at all levels.
- Appreciation of public opinion and attitudes toward the Army
- Planning definite actions and positive policies.
- Implementing programs in a competent, professional and responsible manner.
- Constant evaluation of continuing programs to measure their effect upon the public and the command.
- Sharing the results of the program.

7-3. Commanders must maintain continual liaison with persons and organizations in the local community to help resolve common problems and develop cooperation and understanding between the installation and

the local community. Community relations develop an effective two-way channel of communication between the Army and the community. PA does this by capitalizing on opportunities for better relations and resolving potential and actual areas of conflict.

7-4. Community relations projects or programs may be supported by use of exhibits, equipment and facilities. Exhibits consist of displays such as mission exhibits models, devices and other information and orientation materials at conventions, conferences, seminars demonstrations, exhibits, fairs or similar events. Also included are exhibits displayed on military installations during open house programs.

## COMMUNITY RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

7-5. The goals of community relations is to develop an open, mutually satisfactory, cooperative relationship between the installation and the community. A successful community relations program improves the community's perception of the Army and its appreciation for the installation and the soldiers, family members and civilians who are part of the installation. It is based on openness and honesty. Community relations objectives are community assistance and social improvements for the community in which the military must work and live.

### Historical Perspective

Fort Eustis, Va. started a pilot program in 1992 called Operation Self-Enhancement to give high-risk middle school students the opportunity to visit the post and focus on careers, teamwork and self-esteem. The program was so successful that it has become an annual event. Students receive light military training through an array of testable tasks and obstacles presented by members of a cadre team. This training helps students build their self-esteem and self-confidence and affords them the opportunity to interact with positive role models. This also gives the students a better idea of what the Army is about.

7-6. Community Relations activities include:

- **Speakers Bureaus.** Speakers are an effective means of developing understanding of the Army, stimulating patriotic spirit and informing the public about the activities of the installation, its units and its soldiers. Commanders should establish an installation speakers bureau and encourage soldiers of all ranks to participate in the installation program.
- **Community Liaison.** Maintaining liaison through informal community relations councils can establish and maintain open communications with community officials and organizations. Councils can be charged with a variety of responsibilities, such as developing and promoting new ways for members of the command to actively participate in local community activities, capitalizing on opportunities for better relations and resolving potential and actual areas of conflict. Community liaison can also involve recognition of private citizens, local community leaders and citizen groups and organizations for their support of the Army by public service awards. Commands can further community liaison through membership in civic, business and professional organizations when

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the goals and objectives of those organizations are beneficial to the Army and their programs and projects are consistent with Army interest.

- **Ceremonial Units.** The band, color guard and other ceremonial units participating in public events are excellent ways to accomplish community relations objectives. These representatives of the Army serve as ambassadors to the civilian community and promote patriotism, interest in the Army, and awareness of the professionalism of our forces.
- **Exhibits.** Exhibits and displays of Army equipment, historical materials, models, devices and other information are other community relations activities that can enhance understanding of the Army and the installation. They provide an excellent opportunity for interaction between our soldiers and members of the local community and can communicate the professionalism, readiness and standards of our forces.
- **Open House.** Open houses may be scheduled to coincide with Armed Forces Day, the Army Birthday, service branch birthdays or anniversaries which mark the history of the installation, a unit or community events or in support of media day. An Open House gives the local community an idea of who we are and what we do. They also have the opportunity to visit us on the installation-- at our job site.
- **Physical Improvements.** Community service physical improvements focus on ensuring that the physical infrastructure is as safe as possible and provides the fullest possible range of support to the population. These activities encompass a wide range of programs that do not compete with the services provided by contractors and businesses in the local civilian community.

7-7. Some examples of physical improvements are:

- Construction projects that enhance the recreational, educational, environmental or cultural facilities of the community, such as building community picnic areas and hiking and biking trails.
- Demolition projects that enhance the safety and appearance of the community, such as the removal of unstable playground equipment.
- Projects that create or enhance a safe, clean environment, such as the removal of debris from a community wildlife area or painting a community recreation center.

## TOWN HALL MEETINGS

7-8. Town Hall meetings provide installation commanders with an unfiltered means of communicating ideas to internal and external communities. This tool for conveying important information and ideas about the command cannot be underestimated in its effect and should not be planned haphazardly.

7-9. Commanders, PAOs and staff directorates must work together to produce an effective community relations product.

7-10. Prospective town hall meeting planners must understand, and properly apply, the correct type of town hall meeting. With a focus on the

type of meeting and probable audience, the planner can begin the process of planning and conducting the event.

7-11. As part of the plan, the planner must determine the likely audience for the meeting, including attendees from internal and external audiences. He must also evaluate possible attendance by key publics. The planner should develop a standing operating procedure (SOP) to ensure each mechanism of the process is in place for the scheduled event.

7-12. Finally, post-event analysis is imperative to accurately assess its effectiveness.

7-13. The PAO must develop systems to quickly assess the feedback data and activate a follow-up plan that will maintain confidence from the community that town hall meetings are meaningful events.

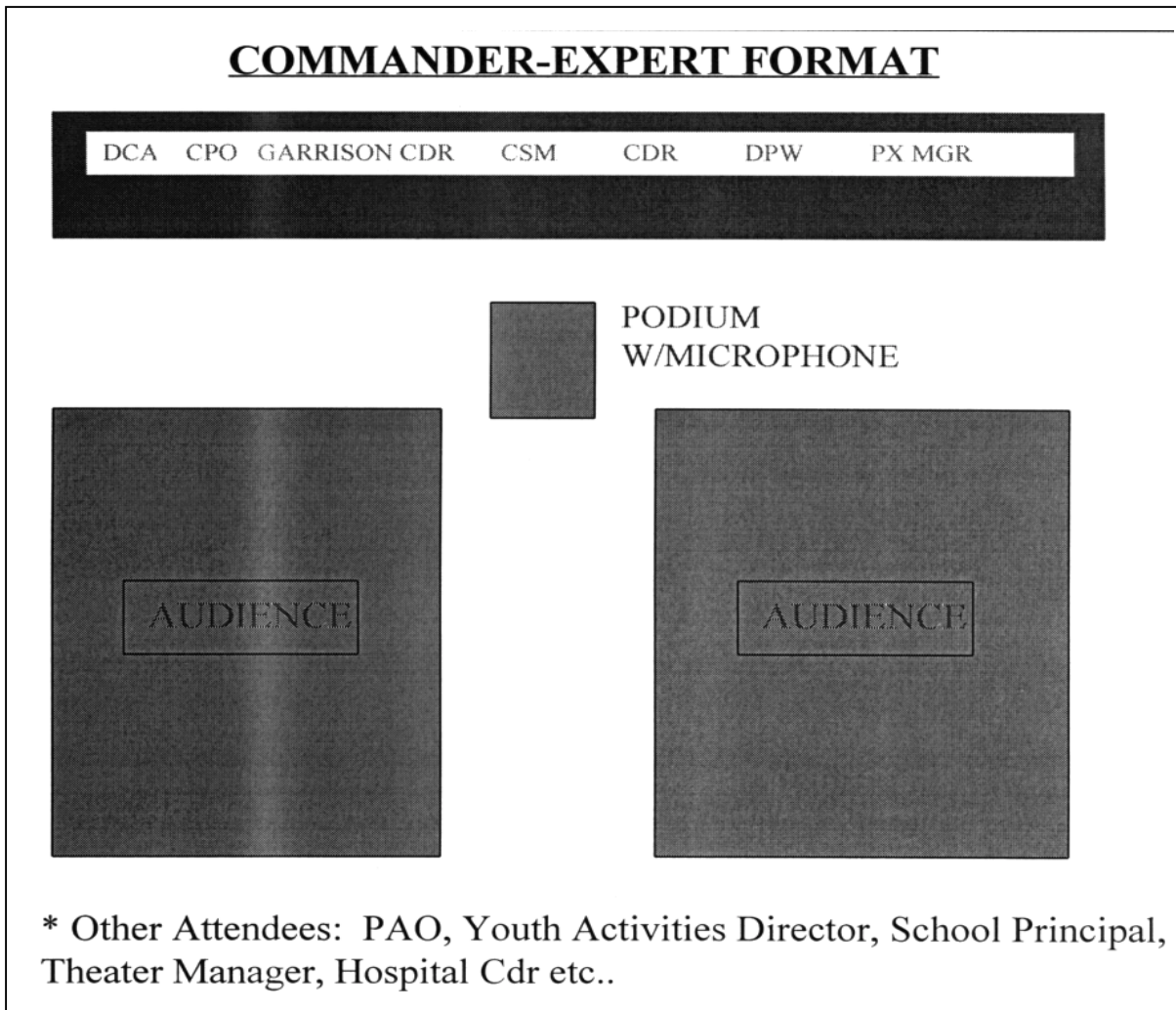
## TYPES OF TOWN HALL MEETINGS

7-14. Installation commanders can stage various types of town hall meetings. The commander must determine which meeting type, or hybrid, is appropriate for disseminating information and gaining useful feedback from internal and external publics.

7-15. The following meeting program structures have inherent strengths and weakness; knowing the potentials for message delivery will assist the commander in making his decision:

- **Commander - Expert Format:** This meeting (Figure 7-1), is characterized by the commander attending with key staff members facing a live audience. Typically the commander and his staff will give presentations and then field questions from the audience. Usually, attendance is open to the public.
- The primary advantages to this format center on the open nature of the meeting.
- This meeting provides the commander with an opportunity to provide detailed presentations with time being a minimal constraint. He also receives instant feedback from the types of questions from the audience and the passion with which questions are asked.
- Meetings in this format are likely to be seen as the most easily accessed by the internal and external publics.
- Among the disadvantages of the format is the ability to reach large audiences and control the conduct of the meeting.
- Unless the meeting is taped for later airing on the commander's cable access channel, the audience is often narrowly focused.
- Although the possibility exists that large audiences will attend, it is also possible small or narrowly focused audience will limit the general effect the commander seeks.
- An open meeting can also become the forum for unruly or disgruntled audience members to incite others or attempt to draw the commander into an open confrontation.
- This factor can be mitigated through the use of question time-limits and use of a moderator (other than the commander), but cannot be

totally eradicated. (As with any other public event, security must be a consideration in the planning process).

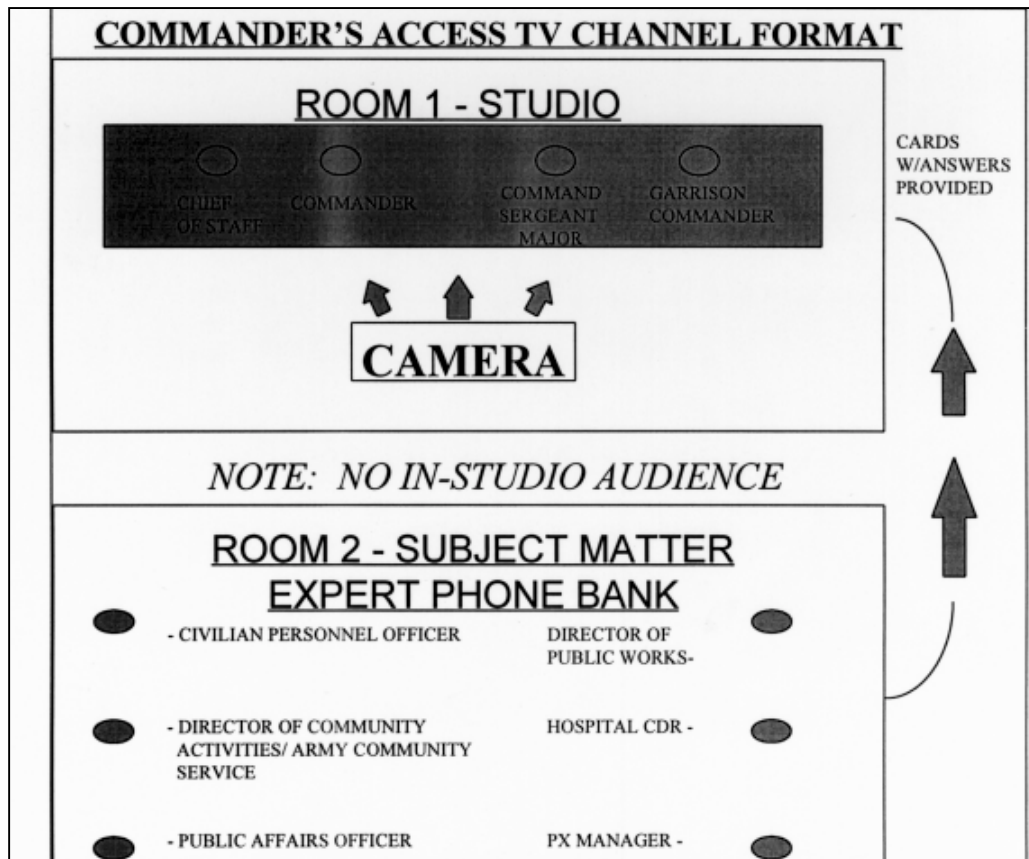


**Figure 7-1. Commander Expert Format**

7-16. Commander Access TV Channel Format: This meeting format (Figure 7-2) uses the commander's cable access channel to air the event. Normally, the commander, CSM and Garrison Commander (and other staff members as necessary) give a presentation. No live audience is in attendance. The commander provides a set of phone numbers, allowing questions to be called in. The staff operates the phone bank, accepts the questions, directs the questions to the appropriate staff agency, and delivers the answers by 3x5 card to the on-air panel. The panel members read the questions/answers to the viewing audience.

7-17. This format offers advantages focused on control and distribution of the product. The venue and the setting are completely controlled by the commander and his staff. The staff screens questions and, thus, no surprises will occur. Indeed, if questions/answers are given to the commander, he may choose to either not answer or return the card for more information.

7-18. Other advantages include an ability to re-run the meeting as often as desired and provide copies to local cable providers, many of which are interested in using the product for airing.



**Figure 7-2. Commander Access TV Channel Format**

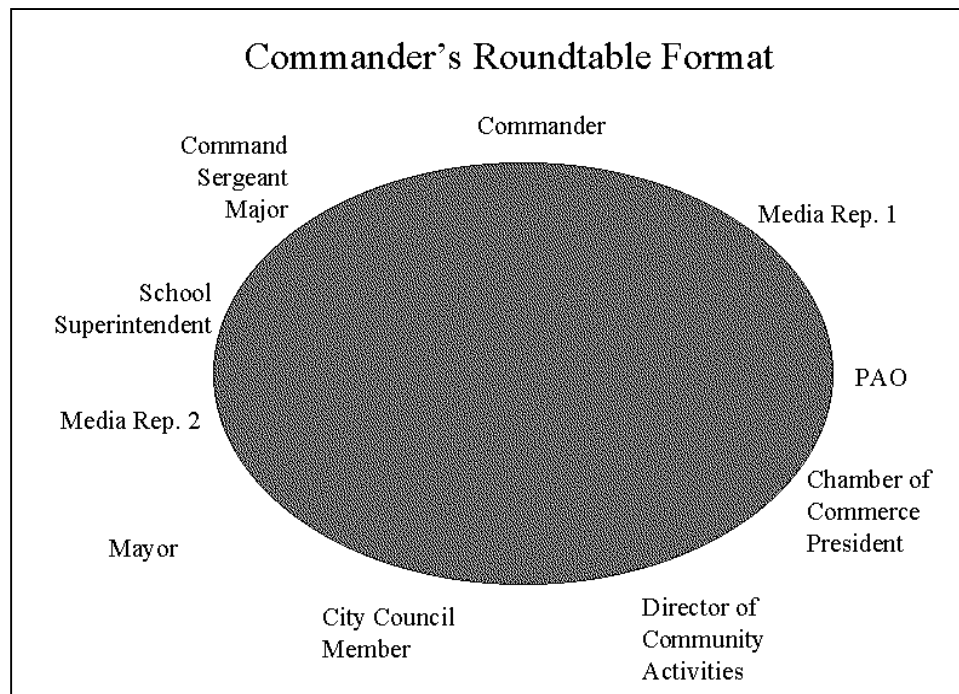
7-19. Disadvantages to this format center on a difficulty in gauging feedback, competing for viewing audiences on television, and providing personal contact with the commander. With no attending audience, collecting feedback data is problematic. Follow-up questionnaires, using statistical probability methods, provide the only means of gaining reliable feedback. The likelihood of viewers to "channel-surf" is high due to the specific nature of questions from callers. Holding the interest of viewers, all of whom have multiple other viewing options available, is difficult. Finally, by appearing on television, in uniform, with a phalanx of staff members, the commander risks appearing to be speaking from "the mount." Audiences may view the commander as speaking down to them and being out-of-touch to their concerns.

7-20. Key members from the internal and external publics form a roundtable discussion (Figure 7-3). The topics are set by published agenda, with some time left for open discussion. The meeting results are published for general distribution. Media are usually invited as participants.

7-21. Roundtable discussions with key publics offer advantages to the commander by providing information to the individuals who represent overlapping and wide constituencies. By setting an agenda, the commander can deliver focused messages with a high likelihood of the messages later reaching targeted audiences. It allows the commander

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and potentially key staff officers to deliver presentations and provide follow-up information to those in attendance.



**Figure 7-3. Roundtable Format**

7-22. The principal disadvantage is the distance between the commander and the publics. The publics will receive information about the meeting second-hand and in a potentially filtered state. Gaining feedback may also prove challenging (but not necessarily impossible). Other disadvantages may be in the limits of the audience makeup; key publics, which are not invited, may resent the slight.

7-23. Commander-in-the-round format. A room is set-up that will allow the commander to be in the middle of all the attendees. Normally, he will stand and walk around in the circle formed by attendees. The meeting is usually open to the public.

7-24. The primary advantage to this format is the close contact the commander shares with his audience. Audience members may feel that barriers are lowered because the commander is close in proximity and no staff members are buffering their access. The commander also can realize feedback very quickly and can gain some appreciation for the resonance of his ideas with the assembled audience.

7-25. Such closeness with the audience can also be a significant disadvantage. Limiting surprises and controlling potentially unruly audiences is extremely difficult in this format. Further, because of the commander's reliance on his personal notes and memory, his ability to provide detailed information and multi-media presentations may be restricted.

7-26. Mitigation against such limits is dependent on the site design. Other disadvantages include problems associated with other "open" formats, including a possibly non-representative makeup of the audience.

7-27. Before deciding on which format is appropriate for the information, the commander must have a plan for what must be achieved.

7-28. Characteristics of an effective plan:

7-29. Answers the “why?” questions. The planner must understand the purpose of the meeting to correctly advise the commander on the format and substance to begin coordination of the plan. As described above, the various formats each have strengths and weaknesses that will assist the planner to shape the meeting.

7-30. Routinely Scheduled. Normally, meetings can be scheduled quarterly or monthly. Use the installation planning cycle to ensure proper coordination and notification of public meetings.

7-31. Site Plan. Checking and securing a site for the town hall meeting is dependent upon the type of meeting selected. Plan for the site early in the process and establish the layout of the site in detail.

7-32. Calendar Check. Before scheduling events, check local and regional calendars for possible conflicts. For example, scheduling a meeting on the same night as the local high school homecoming football game may prove disastrous.

7-33. Presentation Submission Deadline. Coordinate with appropriate staff agencies responsible for preparing presentations. Ensure presentations are properly staffed and approved. As PAO, establish a firm submission cut-off date.

7-34. Focused Presentation. Inform the staff of the commander's intent for the meeting. If the commander wants a particular theme addressed, ensure staff agencies adhere to the parameters of the intent.

7-35. Media Invitation List. Invite local and regional media including print and electronic outlets. Develop relationships with individual reporters and provide background material as necessary. (Local newspapers, radio stations and television stations can often assist in publicizing meetings as well).

7-36. Publicity Plan. Ensure all available avenues are used to publicize meetings. Included in this process are the post newspaper and radio station (where available), normal distribution, staff meetings, E-mail delivery and chain of command communications. Take special care to invite key publics by individual invitation and phone call follow-up.

## EVALUATING FEEDBACK

7-37. Assessing the effectiveness of town hall meetings is essential to developing community-related policies and courses of action for the command. PAOs can use standard statistical measurements using survey techniques to gauge the level and intensity of views of the various publics. Other analyses can be derived from follow-up media content analysis, letters to the commander and post newspaper, and reactions at the meetings. None of the methods described here will render a perfect picture. PAOs must exercise good judgment and personal insight when advising the commander of analytical results.

7-38. **Response Follow-up.** Investigating and responding to issues raised at town hall meetings are critical to public perceptions of the level of care the commander applies to community operations. Just as a



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maneuver commander sees battle damage assessment (BDA) as crucial to determining the efficacy of fires, commanders and PAOs must determine the true productiveness of community relations programs. Commanders will often feel compelled to promise action, such as investigation or immediate problem resolution, during a meeting. Staff agencies are normally the conduit for actions (only occasionally will the commander personally provide the requisite service).

7-39. PAOs should provide the staff oversight of the response mechanism. PAOs can devise a recurring memorandum that provides the commander (usually through the chief of staff), details about the status of actions. All staff agencies should receive updates routinely.

7-40. Along with the response mechanism, PAOs can use command information and media relations channels to inform the publics of problem resolutions. For example, if an issue raised at a town hall meeting indicated that the local recreation center was routinely opening two hours late each day, describe the measures taken to alleviate the problem. The PAO can use the post newspaper or radio station to provide lists of problems and resolutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

7-41. Community relations and activities are vital to instilling and maintaining the confidence of internal and external publics in our great Army. Commanders and PAOs cannot leave the prospect of successful relations to chance. Too much is at stake. Careful selection of the type of town hall meetings to be used must be taken. The event must be planned with the attention to detail required for all military operations. Each part of the plan has unique importance and cannot be overlooked. To ensure the effectiveness of the operation, PAOs are compelled to build a clear mechanism for evaluating outcomes. Finally, the command must provide conspicuous follow-up responses to issues raised to complete the process. Town hall meetings provide an excellent opportunity for commanders and the various publics to interact and improve community institutions.

## **COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE**

7-42. Community assistance applies the skills, capabilities and resources of the needs and interests of the local community. Providing support for and participating in events and activities which are beneficial to both the Army and the community, builds on a long tradition of "America's Army" helping American communities. Identifying opportunities, which advance the interests of both the Army and the community, is an important objective for every commander.

7-43. Community assistance projects and operations must impact positively on the unit or individual soldier, enhance unit or individual readiness and contribute toward the common good of the community. Army commanders must ensure that their initiatives are not competitive with local resources or services and do not benefit any particular interest group and will not result in monetary or service remuneration in any form for unit members or the unit as a whole.

7-44. Increasing public awareness and understanding of the Army, inspiring patriotism and enhancing the Army's reputation as a good

neighbor is a goal of community assistance. Community assistance activities can help build unit morale and esprit de corps. These activities also provide an excellent opportunity for soldiers to serve as role models, which not only enhances recruiting efforts, but also serves to motivate soldiers by promoting their self-esteem and furthering their sense of service to the nation.

## READINESS ENHANCEMENT

7-45. Certain community assistance activities enable a commander to train soldiers, enhance individual and unit readiness, maximize use of assets and foster a positive training environment where soldiers can become involved in realistic, “hands-on” training opportunities. Projects should be selected which exercise individual soldier skills, encourage teamwork, challenge leader planning and coordination skills, and result in measurable, positive accomplishment. Finally they should enable a unit to exercise use of its equipment, resulting in training opportunities that can generate greater operator efficiency for future missions.

7-46. Examples are:

- **Medical Readiness Program.** The Medical Readiness Program is an activity in which Army medical unit personnel, together with state medical emergency officials, plan and provide support in the form of diagnosis, treatment, and preventive medical, dental, and veterinary care to citizens in remote areas of the U.S. or its territories. The program is designed to enhance the unit's medical readiness, provide unit training opportunities and serve the public in locations where medical care is not otherwise available. The program may not compete with local private medical care that may be available.
- **Air Ambulance Participation.** The Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic Program. (MAST) is a proven example of Army support to civil authorities. This program permits the utilization of Army aviation assets to conduct emergency air evacuation and recovery efforts.
- These projects contribute to the health and welfare of the community, making the Army an integral partner in community progress and development. They can enhance the ability of the local community to support itself and its people, to provide the best possible services to the citizens and to promote a positive, healthy safe environment.
- Community service activities are those which focus on improving the community, its infrastructure and its ability to serve the local population.

7-47. **Social Improvements.** Community service social improvements, which focus on making the social environment as healthy as possible, provide the widest range of support to the population. They encompass many projects including:

7-48. Support to youth programs, such as scouting and programs that provide assistance to special need audiences such as the Special Olympics.

7-49. Examples are:

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- The Civilian Youth Opportunities Program (Challenge). This is a youth program directed at attaining a high school diploma, providing job training and placement, improving personal and social skills and providing health and hygiene education and physical training. Soldiers work with civilian leaders to provide a comprehensive support package, ranging from choosing appropriate clothing to attending residential training facilities.
  - Youth Physical Fitness Clinic Program. The National Guard encourages fitness and combines academic and athletic achievement by helping schools conduct competitions in selected athletic events. This program also establishes a separate scholar-athlete category for those students with a 3.5 or higher grade point average.

7-50. Involvement in ventures and projects that enhance the educational or cultural climate of the community, such as adult literacy, reading or community theater programs.

7-51. Examples are:

- Civilian Community Corps. This program provides managerial, organizational and technical skills for disadvantaged Americans seeking the skills for success. Through this program, the Army helps participants become productive citizens. In exchange, participants perform a wide range of community service activities that improve the foundation of American society. This program encourages intra-governmental cooperation on the federal level. It also encourages partnerships with industry, education, state, federal and local governments.
- Science and Technology Academies Reinforcing Basic Aviation and Space Exploration Program. (STARBASE) This program is an innovative partnership of professional educators, military personnel and corporate sponsors. It promotes science, mathematics and technology basics for primary through secondary schools. Using National Guard resources to spark student interest, the program develops strong self-esteem, provides excellent role models, promotes positive attitudes and develops goal-setting skills.
- The guiding principle behind community relations efforts is that the installation and the community have a common interest in providing the best possible support for each other. A cooperative relationship exists, because soldiers stationed at the installation receive life support from the community while many of the civilians who make up the community receive life support from the installation. The interdependence of the military installation and the civilian community can involve economics, education, health care, basic services, quality-of life issues and many others.
- The community relations goal of local commanders is to develop an open, mutually satisfactory, cooperative relationship between the installation and the community. These efforts improve the community's perception of the installation and the soldiers, family members and civilians who are part of the installation.
- Participation in community relations activities is an effective method for projecting a positive Army image, making the best use

of assets, providing alternative training opportunities and enhancing the relationship between the Army and the American public. Activities vary widely, ranging from individual soldier involvement to full Army participation. They are characterized by detailed coordination between the military command and community authorities. They fulfill community needs that would not otherwise be met, enhance soldier and unit morale, skills and readiness and improve the mutual support between the military and civilian communities.